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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [IV](#)
SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: INFORMATION ON OHCHR FIELD PRESENCE
REF: STATE 73151

Classified By: Econ. Chief A. Lewis for reason 1.4(B) & (D)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is represented in Cote d'Ivoire by the Division of Human Rights (HR), which is part of the larger UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI). Its overarching mission is to promote human rights in Cote d'Ivoire. The HR works in a collaborative fashion with the other divisions of UNOCI, particularly UN military peacekeepers (PKU) and civilian police (UNCIVPOL), and cooperates with other UN agencies in Cote d'Ivoire such as the Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (OCHA). In addition, HR partners with a number of local NGOs, who act as HR's eyes and ears in the field. HR believes that with additional resources it would be a more effective observer and recorder of violations, and it could beef up its technical assistance programs. Finally, HR believes that it is constrained by its mandate. It has no power, for example, to force engagement of UN troops, CIVPOL officers, or unarmed military observers to prevent or halt ongoing violations. HR and the local NGO community would like to see more done on the prevention of violations. End Summary

Human Rights Division Structure

¶2. (U) HR's overarching mission is to promote human rights in Cote d'Ivoire based on international norms. To meet this mandate, HR engages in the following day-to-day operations: observation and verification of violations of human rights; lobbying of local and national governments and ex-rebel officials to insure protection of civilians, particularly women and children; documentation of acts of violence against women and girls; technical assistance and capacity building for local NGOs; and, assistance for the installation of a National Commission on Human Rights. HR has 29 human rights officer and an equal number of local staff scattered throughout Cote d'Ivoire. The staff are located in both the government-controlled South (Abidjan, Yamoussoukro, Daloa), and the ex-rebel controlled North (Bouake, Odienne, Korhogo, and Bouna.) HR has requested funding for an additional southern office in San Pedro in its 2006-07 budget. IT has no immediate plans to reopen its Guiglo office, which has been closed since the anti-UN violence occurred in the South in January 2006. The HR works in a collaborative fashion with the other divisions of UNOCI - Gender Unit, PKU, and UNCIVPOL - and with other UN agencies such as OCHA. HR also partners with a number of local NGOs, who act as HR's eyes and ears in the field. Until the anti-UN violence in January 2006, HR was conducting weekly meetings, which brought together the NGOs, PKU, UNCIVPOL, and officials from the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Internal Security. At this weekly forum, NGOs would share their concerns about specific cases and would have the opportunity to engage the requisite ministries. Based on the information it collects, either first-hand or via its partner NGOs, HR prepares quarterly reports. (Note: Reports used to

be monthly, but due to resource constraints HR has now decided to publish quarterly.) In addition, when special investigative missions are sent by the OHCHR, HR acts as local guide for the staff from Geneva.

Human Rights Division's Self Assessment

¶3. (SBU) HR believes that, with additional man-power and extra field offices, it would be a more effective observer and recorder of violations. HR has asked for greater resources in its 2006-07 budget in order to expand its technical assistance programs, something that the local NGO community is clamoring for. Finally, HR believes that it is constrained by UNOCI's mandate. It has no power, for example, to force engagement by UN troops, CIVPOL officers, or even unarmed military observers to prevent or halt ongoing violations. HR would like to see more done on the prevention of violations, but the Division Chief, Simon Munzu, asserts that unless UNOCI's mandate changes, HR cannot legally become more involved in the prevention of violations.

Assessment by Local NGOs

¶4. (C) We interviewed six of the most-prominent Ivoirian human rights organizations, who are HR's partners, to garner an outside assessment of the HR. The NGOs are: Association for the Promotion of Human Rights (ADPH), Ivoirian Human Rights League (LIDHO), National Organization for Children (ONEF), Organization of Active Women of Cote d'Ivoire (OFACI), the Ivorian Human Rights Movement (MIDH), and the Association of Women Lawyers (AFJCI).

¶5. (SBU) The NGOs:

-- Stated that they were glad that the Human Rights Division exists. However, none of the organizations thought that HR's profile was high enough. Most of the organizations anticipate that human rights violations will only increase the closer Cote d'Ivoire moves to elections and suggested the need for a "Special Representative for Human Rights."

-- Lamented the lack of financial support and paucity of technical assistance programs provided by HR. Since the events of November 2004, most of the organization have seen their bilateral funding sources (Germany, Switzerland, Canada, EU) dry up, and as a consequence they are looking to the UN to fill the gap.

-- Asked for USG support to restart their weekly sessions. However, the NGOs asked that the HR filter which organizations it brings to the table. There were unanimity between the NGOs that the meetings had gotten unwieldy and there were too many groups there who were only interesting in taking notes on who was complaining about violations. Many NGO leaders we spoke to expressed concerns about the threats they had received in the months preceding January 2006 due to the cases they chose to bring before the combined HR/UN/NGO/GOCI group.

-- Stated that HR seemed to spend most of its time writing non-public reports. The groups interviewed understood that HR's mandate did not extend to enforcement, but nonetheless they believed it is important for the victims, unless they specifically request privacy, that HR's reporting be made public.

-- Requested that HR move to a more pro-active posture. The NGOs stated that it was good to record violations after the fact. However, they wanted to see the UN actively protecting civilians and taking steps to promote human rights and prevent violations from occurring.

-- Complained that HR, PKU, and UNCIVPOL all disappear at the first sign of trouble, often leaving their local partners exposed to danger. They cited both November 2004 and January 2006 as times when the UN was unavailable.

¶6. (C) Comment: the general consensus is that Cote d'Ivoire

is better off with the UN's Division of Human Rights than without. However, resource constraints and limitations in its mandate stymie its effectiveness in Cote d'Ivoire. It is difficult to imagine that UNOCI's Division of Human Rights will receive an across-the-board budgetary increase. HR could choose to shift its current resources away from highly paid expatriate staff, who write gobs of reports, and move to a leaner structure where its limited funding would be allocated to support local NGOs. Increases in small grant authority for technical assistance programs, for example, would go a long way to help support the NGO community in its efforts to monitor the situation in the field. The NGO's comments about the disappearance of the UN in times of crisis is unfortunately true. The UN has focused on the protection of UN personnel and equipment before the protection of civilian lives and property. Based on its past performance efficacy, if asked to provide a grade, we would give the HR a C- at best. End Comment
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